

## CLERKS, ARTISANS, AND SPECIALISTS

# THE IMMUNES

There appear to have been ample opportunities for the legionary who wished to dodge the daily drudgery of military life, since the possession of some special skill or talent might enable him to gain employment as a clerk or artisan. A contemporary source from the Antonine period lists an astounding variety of such specialisms, though it is often unclear how they impacted upon the ordinary Roman soldier's daily routine.

By Duncan B. Campbell

In a well-known papyrus letter of 26 March AD 107, a soldier named Julius Apollinarius explains to his father that, while his comrades spend their days dressing building stones (apparently for the new legionary fortress at Bostra in Arabia), he has managed to acquire the job of *librarius legionis* ("legionary clerk"), reporting to a *cornicularius* ("chief clerk"). In another letter from around the same time, Apollinarius tells his mother that his status as a *principalis* grants him exemption from the laborious stone-cutting that he sees all around him. His skills in literacy had evidently enabled him to mount the first rung on the ladder of promotion.

However, it was not only the literate who managed to avoid the daily toil of soldiering. Two ancient writers shed some light on the matter. The first of these is Tarrutienus Paternus, a well-known jurist who wrote a lost work *On Military Affairs*, probably around AD 175 (he was the emperor Commodus' Praetorian Prefect). Justinian's *Digest of Roman Law* quotes a passage in which Paternus claims that "the status of certain men [in the Roman army] grants them exemption from the more onerous duties". And after listing several dozen specialists, many of them artisans of some sort, he ends by noting that "all of these

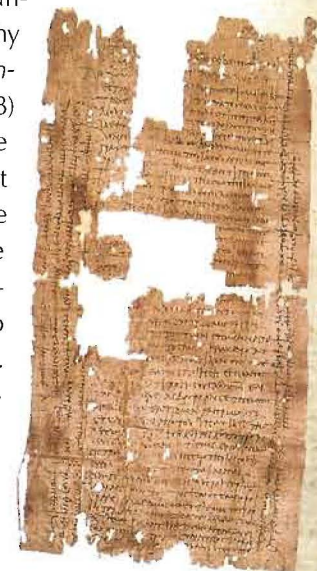
are classed amongst the *immunes*" (*Digest* 50.6.7), a term that underlines their exemption from *munera* or drudge-work.

The other literary source is the writer Vegetius, whose late-fourth-century compilation, the *Epitome of Military Science*, allegedly drew upon the work of Paternus amongst others. At one point, Vegetius lists "the titles and ranks of the *principales milites*" (the "chief soldiers"), some (but not all) of whom appear in Paternus' list of *immunes*. Vegetius claims that "these are the chief soldiers, who are protected by their privileges. The rest are called *munifices*, because they are forced to perform duties" (*Epitome* 2.7). The term *munifex* underlines the link between the ordinary soldier and his duties (*munera*).

Over a hundred years ago, the fundamental study of the military hierarchy by Alfred von Domaszewski (*Die Rangordnung des römischen Heeres*, 1908) divided Vegetius' *principales* into three categories: those men whose specialist jobs entailed no increased salary (these he took to be *immunes* proper); those who received pay-and-a-half (classified as *sesquiplarii*); and those who received double pay (the *duplicarii*). Furthermore, he suggested that the important subdivision of the *principales* was actually between the *immunes* and those others who filled promoted

Letter written by Julius Apollinarius in AD 107. Papyrus from Karanis (Egypt), now in the collection of Michigan University (P.Mich. VIII 466).

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posts, either within each *centuria* (the century of 80 legionaries led by a centurion, or its equivalent in Rome's other military services) or on the staffs of various senior officers, and who are often nowadays characterized as 'junior officers'.

### Who were the *immunes*?

A study of the inscriptions erected by the units of the Roman army or their individual members demonstrates that soldiers rarely classified themselves simply as *principales*, preferring to specify their precise role or function within that grouping. By contrast, several dozen inscriptions confirm that some soldiers indeed considered themselves to be *immunes*, first and foremost, although very few of them specified the particular function that they performed. For example, a tombstone from Aquincum (Pannonia) records that "Aelius Messius, *immunis* of the First Adiutrix Legion, and Aurelia Tacita set this up for their most devoted daughter, Aelia Messorina, who lived 2 years 4 months and 15 days" (CIL III 3531).

G.R. Watson, the scholar of Roman military documentation and author of *The Roman Soldier* (1969), believed that *immunes* like Aelius Messius were probably legionary clerks, based on Domaszewski's conjecture that Lucius Tonneius Martialis, *cerarius legionis* (CIL VIII 2986), and Gaius Comatius Flavinus, *immunis caerei legionis XIII Geminae* (CIL III 14358), spent their days handling wax tablets (*cerae*). It is true that the Valerianus who appears as *immunis tubularius* on an altar from Carnuntum (AE 1998, 1043) may in fact have been a *tabularius* ("archivist"). But clerks are amongst the most likely to state their function as *librarii* upon their inscriptions, while Paternus' list of *immunes* indicates that it was not only clerks who enjoyed exemption from fatigues.

Many *immunes* appear to have been artisans of some sort, and it is quite understandable that they should have been excused general duties in order to perform their specialist roles as "glassfitters (*specularii*), carpenters (*fabri*), arrow-makers (*sagittarii*), coppersmiths (*aerarii*), wagonwrights (*carpentarii*), roof-tile-makers (*scandularii*), water engineers (*aquilices*)",

and so on (to quote a few from Paternus' list). Some artisans, such as the two men who appear as *immunes figlinarii* ("kiln workers") on an altar from Bonn (AE 1930, 33), may have found daily work in their specialization, but it seems unlikely that all of Paternus' *immunes* were in constant demand, and many perhaps enjoyed the leisure that Julius Apollinarius brags about, when he tells his mother that he "wanders around doing nothing".

Others on Paternus' list who may have been required on a daily basis are the "keepers of sacrificial animals" (*victimarii*), who were important specialists, given the number of religious festivals celebrated each year by units of the Roman army. The so-called *Feriale Duranum*, a fragmentary military calendar of the early third century discovered at Dura-Europus, lists at least 26 occasions on which sacrifices were necessary, and the animals were no doubt subsequently butchered and consumed. In fact, butchers (*lani*) and huntsmen (*venatores*) also figure on Paternus' list, the latter perhaps employed by officers on hunting expeditions, although the soldiers' diet might have been supplemented by meat from wild animals. It is interesting to note that the 75 members of a vexillation drawn from the Eleventh Claudia Legion in AD 155 included two *immunes venatores* (CIL III 7449).

### What work did they avoid?

It is worth considering the identity of the more onerous duties (or, in Watson's version, "more menial fatigues") from which the *immunes* were excused. A well-known papyrus of AD 87 presents a table recording the duties of 36 legionaries for the first ten days in October. Though many of the abbreviations defy sensible interpretation, several men are clearly listed as *stationes* ("guards") at the *principia* (the headquarters building) or at one of the fortress gates, while one man appears to have been assigned *ad stercus* ("latrine duty"), and several are recorded as *ballio*, which is thought to be connected with the fortress baths (*balnea*), either feeding the furnace or maintaining discipline in what could become a rowdy environment. Others had duties incorporating the word *via* ("road"), probably indicating some sort of patrolling,

Replica of an altar to the god Mithras, discovered in the ruins of a Mithraeum at Großkrotzenburg in 1881 but now lost (CIL XIII 7416). It was set up by Julius Macrinus, an *immunis* of the Eighth Augusta Legion, to fulfil a vow made to the god. Mithras (often spelled Mytras, as here) was invariably equated with Sol Invictus, "the Unconquered Sun".

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while some are listed as *ad centuriam* ("at the barracks"). Five had no duties at all.

The same papyrus has a list subtracting nine men from an initial complement of 40, to give a remainder of 31. It may be no coincidence that this is the number of men listed with the above duties. The other nine, described as *opera vacantes* ("free from duties"), are listed as a *custos armorum* ("weapons keeper"), a *conductor* (perhaps some sort of clerk), a *carrarius* (a wagon repairer or driver), a *secutor tribuni* ("tribune's attendant"), a *custos domi* ("housekeeper"), a *supranumerarius* (a supernumerary whose significance is unclear), a *stationem agens* ("acting guard", whose significance is again unclear), and two men described as *librarius et cerarius* (probably a clerk in charge of wax tablets) – all of whom clearly qualify as *immunes*. Why there were only 40 men in total remains unclear, though it implies a seriously under-strength *centuria*, and the proportion of *immunes* to *munifices* is surprising.

It is surprising also that Paternus' list of *immunes* includes *artifices qui fossam faciunt* ("men skilled in making ditches"), as this might seem the very definition of onerous or menial work. However, these men were perhaps responsible for laying out the ditch before the ordinary soldiers began digging. Certainly, Paternus' list includes surveyors (*mensores*) and master-builders (*architecti*), who presumably provided similar specialized skills.

### Who were the clerks?

Paternus' list includes a considerable number of clerical workers, which is perhaps unsurprising given the bureaucratic nature of the Roman army. There are "clerks who are able to instruct, clerks of the granaries, clerks of the deposits, and clerks of those who have fallen" (*librarii caducorum*, which Watson glossed as "clerks responsible for monies left without heirs").

Since the list of 40 legionaries (mentioned above) includes two clerks, we may suppose that this was the usual complement for a *centuria*. Watson took the view that the *librarius* (whom he explained as the "company clerk") was separate from the *cerarius*

and indeed outranked him, on the basis of two inscriptions erected by Lucius Tonneius Martialis, in which he appears to have held first one title and then the other (ILS 2425 and 2426). However, the papyrus seems to imply that it was a joint title held, in this case, by two men. At any rate, the two clerks will have come under the supervision of the *signifer*, a *duplicarius* ("double-pay man") who, besides his function as standard-bearer, is known to have been in charge of the century's pay and savings chest. The documentation thus generated would perhaps have best suited Paternus' *librarius depositorum* ("clerk of the deposits", which Watson glossed as "clerks responsible for monies left on deposit"), a term that nevertheless remains unattested on inscriptions.

By contrast, Julius Apollinarius, as a *librarius legionis* answering to a *cornicularius* (a chief clerk who ranked as a *duplicarius*), had probably found employment in his legion's *tabularium principis* ("headquarters records office"). From there, he might have entertained hopes of becoming a *signifer* one day, and eventually a *cornicularius* in charge of his own administrative staff. **AV**

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**Further reading**

Two books are fundamental to any study of Roman military bureaucracy. One is Alfred von Domaszewski's *Die Rangordnung des römischen Heeres* (Bonn 1908, reprinted in 1967 with an extensive introduction by Brian Dobson). The other is G.R. Watson's *The Roman Soldier* (London 1969).



Tombstone of Marcus Aurelius Placidus, *immunis* of the Second Traiana Legion, from the Severan period.

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### ► DID YOU KNOW?

Did you know that one of Paternus' *immunes* is called a *pollio*, the meaning of which continues to elude scholars. Previous suggestions include "horse trainer", "weapons polisher", and "Latin tutor".